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CULTURE MONSTER

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5 DAYS OUT

Highlights of the week ahead in arts, music and performance.

ART
"Thomas Gainsborough and the Modern Woman"
Where: San Diego Museum of Art
When: Opens Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Through May 1.
Tickets: $12 adults, $9 seniors, $8 college students, $4.50 youths

THEATER
"A Midsummer Night's Dream"
Where: South Coast Repertory
When: Opens Friday, 8 p.m. Through Feb. 20.
Tickets: $20-$66

MUSIC
CEAIT Festival
Where: REDCAT
When: 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 7 p.m. Sunday
Tickets: $25 general admission, $20 students

JAZZ
Daniel Rosenboom Sextet
Where: The Blue Whale
When: 9 p.m. Thursday
Tickets: $10

OPERA
"Medea" by Luigi Cherubini
Where: Long Beach Opera
When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday (also 7:30 p.m. Feb. 5 and 2 p.m. Feb. 6)
Tickets: $25-$110

CULTURE WATCH

BOOKS
"L.A. Rising: SoCal Artists Before 1980"
Lyn Kienholz, ed.
516 pp. (California/International Arts Foundation)

Perry Mason had an art gallery? Yes, the Raymond Burr Gallery was once in Beverly Hills. That's one factoid in an instantly indispensable "encyclopedia" of more than 500 artists who worked and showed in L.A. before the city emerged as an international powerhouse.
— Christopher Knight

CDs
Vinicius Cantuária & Bill Frisell: "Lágrimas Mexicanas"
(Entertainment One)

After collaborating off and on for 25 years, this first full-length pairing of Frisell and the Brazilian singer-songwriter is a study in the jazz guitarist's ability to thrive in any genre. Frisell's Americana twang and echoing feedback mixed with twilit Bossa Nova is irresistible.
— Chris Barton

Giya Kancheli: "Themes From the "Songbook"
(ECM)

Who knew that Giya Kancheli, the melancholy composer from the republic of Georgia, wrote sly, seductive songs and dances for Shakespeare and Arthur Miller plays and for Georgian films with titles such as "The Eccentrics" and "Earth, This is Your Son"? Here they are, played by Dino Salazar (bandoneón), Gidon Kremer (violin) and Andrei Pushkarev (vibraphone).
— Mark Swed

DVDs
"András Schiff Plays Bach"
(EuroArts)

The Hungarian pianist — videotaped playing the six French Suites last summer in a church in Leipzig, where Bach lived and worked — would be the last word in elegance and intelligence, if the bonus disc of Schiff explaining Bach didn't contain those last, wondrous words.
— Mark Swed

THEATER
"The Trial of Hamlet"
(USC's Bovard Auditorium)

Was the murder of Polonius a premeditated crime, the act of a lunatic or an innocent mistake? Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy presides over a trial featuring high-profile lawyers and a celebrity jury. Monday 7:30 pm. (800) 838-3006 or *www.Shakespearecenter.org.*
— Charles McNulty

Genaro Molina Los Angeles Times

ONE CITY, DIFFERENT VIEWS: The Reading L.A. project will cover a number of accounts from throughout Los Angeles history.

Reading L.A.

One year, 25 books on Southern California architecture and urbanism, with a mix of obscure treatises and respected classics — who's in to read along?

CHRISTOPHER HAWTHORNE
ARCHITECTURE CRITIC

Los Angeles, with its car-dominated landscape and unusually dense brand of sprawl, can be a slippery place to get a handle on. As the late architect Charles Moore once put it, L.A. requires "an altogether different plan of attack" — on the part of architects, critics and historians alike — than older, more traditionally organized cities do.

L.A.'s various chroniclers have come up with a remarkably diverse collection of such plans over the decades, and making sense of them is among the major goals of Reading L.A., a yearlong project I'll be kicking off this month and that will appear throughout 2011 on Culture Monster. I'll be reading through 25 of the most significant books on Southern California architecture and urbanism, moving chronologically and posting a series of brief essays as I go.

In large part I see the project as a way to take a new and detailed look at the major works in the L.A. canon — books by Carey McWilliams, Reyner Banham, Mike Davis and others that, paradoxically enough, have become so well-established that some of their original ambition and power have faded. But I'll also take detours to include lesser-known books by authors such as Richard Meltzer, David Brodsly and William Alexander McClung.

The schedule is straightforward: I'll be reading two books per month over the course of the year, plus one extra thrown in along the way, for a total of 25. We'll begin, this month, with a pair of classics: Louis Adamic's "The Truth About Los Angeles," published in 1927, and the efficiently titled "Los Angeles," by Morrow Mayo, from 1933. The full list can be found on Culture Monster.

By the end of the year, I hope to have a better handle on how the city has been explored by the critics and writers who preceded me here. But the idea is not just to look back but also forward, as the suburban Los Angeles that many of the writers on my list took as their essential subject, with its wide-open freeways and neighborhoods anchored by the single-family house, is gone — or at least dying a slow and difficult death.

Another goal is simply to fix a spotlight on the city and keep it there for a full 12 months. Compared to other American cities, Los Angeles has never been particularly interested in examining or talking about itself. To an extent, this has been part of its appeal to newcomers, as the city — compared to London, say, or Boston — can seem refreshingly liberated from the weight of history and community expectation. But as L.A. lurches toward a denser future, it faces a number of fundamental questions about what kind of place it wants to be. In that context, its lack of interest in looking closely at itself can be a major liability.

Reading L.A. is not organized as a formal book club — a few of the titles, after all, are not just out of print but also nearly impossible to find. (Most are available at the L.A. public library.) But I encourage readers who are interested to join me in all or part of it. I should also stress that the list of 25 is hardly set in stone: If you're surprised to see that I've left out one of your favorite books on the city and its architecture, or you think one or more titles I've included seems out of place, by all means let me know.

All blog posts on the project will appear under the heading Reading L.A., and I'll mark discussion of it on my Twitter feed (twitter.com/hawthornelat) with the hashtag #readingLA. I look forward to your suggestions, complaints and ideas as the project moves forward.

christopher.hawthorne@latimes.com

Readings

January selections: "The Truth About Los Angeles," by Louis Adamic (1927)
"Los Angeles," by Morrow Mayo (1933).

February selections: "Southern California: An Island on the Land," by Carey McWilliams (1946)
"Five California Architects," by Esther McCoy (1960).

The complete list of the year's reading is on latimes.com/culturemonster.

IT SPEAKS TO ME | ELEANOR ANTIN

'Blindman's Bluff'
Jean-Honoré Fragonard, circa 1775-80
Timken Museum in San Diego

This Fragonard canvas isn't much larger than a sheet of typing paper. It shows a pastel-colored company of elegant ladies and gentlemen in a garden landscape, overhung by a blue-gray mist that either predicts a lowering storm or is simply the under-painting. The game of blindman's bluff has been interrupted. No one is paying attention to the "blindman," who waits under a parasol in his blindfold while everyone, including a marble statue, is looking out to the left toward something we cannot see, something that is either coming or leaving. But every coming is also a leaving, as every leaving is also a coming. Is it the dark cloud of 1789 coming or the twilit glow of the ancient regime leaving? The painting is a puzzle without a solution that reminds me of my own "Last Days of Pompeii" photographs. Is the Postmodern Rococo or is the Rococo Postmodern?
— Artist Eleanor Antin, as told to Jori Finkel

Timken Museum of Art

GAMELY: "The painting is a puzzle without a solution.... Is the Postmodern Rcooo or is the Rococo Postmodern?"

SPOTLIGHT

'Circle' opens, secrets escape

Secrets, those emotional IEDs, detonate in irrevocable ways in South Coast Repertory's "Circle Mirror Transformation," Annie Baker's innovative dramedy about an acting class taught in a small Vermont town. Forget learning monologues from "The Crucible" — Marty (Linda Gehringer) wants her four students to open up, listen and, above all, communicate. But is she really ready to hear what they'll say?

Late in the play, Marty gathers her creative drama group into a circle. "I want you to write down a secret you've never, ever told anyone," she instructs. "The first big thing that comes into your mind. Even if it's scary." Each person writes down something, anonymously. Marty collects the slips of paper, then redistributes them. "What if you pick your own?" asks Schultz (Arye Gross), reaching gingerly for a folded note. "Just read it anyway," Marty says. "We won't know."

But in a group this intimate, how hard will it be to guess who wrote what? As the secrets are read aloud, you can feel the audience reacting along with the class members: Everyone silently assigning authorship to a secret, silently reacting to each bomb that's just been dropped.

In that moment, we too become members of Marty's class.
—Charlotte Stoudt
At South Coast Repertory through Jan. 30.

Scott Brinegar South Coast Repertory

CLASS: Arye Gross, left, Linda Gehringer, Lily Holleman and Marin Hinkle.

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